



Week 9: The Mystery Ephesians 3:1-13

GOAL:

To live as good stewards of God's rich grace, empowered and enlisted by our own experience of it.

CHECKLIST

- Prepare for your group meeting by praying for yourself and your group (feel free to use the prayer below) and reading through this Leader's Guide.
- Take attendance in Planning Center, including guests/new members.
- Remind your group about serving at Viola's House on November 23 from 8am-12pm. Your group can plan lunch together after, if you'd like.
- Share the schedule for the next few weeks.
 - 11/24: 9:30 Grow Groups, 11:00 Worship
 - 11/25-12/1: Thanksgiving Break (no GG)
 - 12/8-11: Christmas Store Serve Week
 - 12/15-18: Final week of Grow Groups

PREPARING THROUGH PRAYER:

Father, we come before you with hearts full of gratitude for the immeasurable gift of your grace. Thank You for loving us so deeply, and for offering us forgiveness, hope, and transformation through Christ. Your grace is beyond our understanding, yet it surrounds us every day, drawing us closer to you and empowering us to live for you. We are so thankful that your grace knows no bounds—that it is available to all, no matter our past or present, and that it has the power to change even the hardest of hearts. Thank you for calling us to be part of your family and for making us vessels of your love to the world around us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. Hebrews 10:24-25

CONNECT, COORDINATE, & PRAY

To catch up with each other, invite group members to share a joy and a challenge they are currently experiencing. Remember, also, that many of us are still feeling the significance of the elections this week, perhaps with lingering feelings of either triumph or concern. With that in mind, spend time praying for your group members, for our country and leadership, and for your time together today.

Take time to coordinate details and plans for:

- Viola's House Serve Day - Saturday, November 23, 8am-12pm (details in Wednesday's leader email)
- Grow Group Schedule for the remaining weeks of the semester:
 - 11/17-20: regular Grow Group meeting
 - 11/24: 9:30 Grow Groups, 11:00 Worship
 - 11/25-12/1: Thanksgiving Break (no GG)
 - 12/8-11: Christmas Store Serve Week
 - 12/15-18: Final week of Grow Groups

DISCUSS

Leaders: *Have you ever been in the middle of telling a story, only to get so excited that you start veering off into another topic? Maybe you're describing a work trip and suddenly launch into a story about an amazing restaurant you discovered. Soon, you're deep into talking about the fantastic burgers and milkshakes, swept up in how incredible it all was!*

In today's passage, we see Paul doing something similar. Paul begins by talking about his imprisonment (remember, Paul is writing this letter while imprisoned in Rome), but he gets so caught up in the wonder of Christ's mystery that he eagerly veers off before circling back to his original thought...which we will pick back up next week.

It's been a few weeks since we concluded our study of Ephesians 2. You may recall that, in chapters 1 and 2, Paul shares deep truths about salvation, the Church, and the inclusion of Gentiles in God's redemptive plan. Now, he shifts to a more personal perspective, sharing his calling and how Christ is actively working through him and all who follow Christ.

As Paul reflects on God's work in his life, his focus turns to the mystery of Christ, allowing his passion to emerge, much like someone recounting an event that deeply moves them. If Paul is so deeply moved by this mystery, it signals a unique opportunity for us to gain insight into God's calling for each of us as His followers.

- What is something about which you are really passionate? Something you talk about often?

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The Mystery Revealed: Read Ephesians 3:1-6.

- In these verses, Paul mentions a mystery. What is this “mystery” Paul is talking about?

Leaders: Before Paul prayed for the Ephesians at the end of chapter 3, he shared, as one Bible commentary puts it, the “details of his message and ministry.” In verse 2, Paul stated that God had given him grace and now he wanted to give that grace to the Ephesians. And this mystery was revealed to him by God, which he briefly discussed in Ephesians 2:11–22. In verse 4, Paul encouraged his readers that they could have understanding of the mystery through his words. In verse 5, Paul explained when the mystery was uncovered—it “was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed.” This mystery was revealed to Paul by the Holy Spirit, and to the “holy apostles and prophets” (v. 5).

So, what is this mystery? This “mystery,” revealed to him by the Holy Spirit, involves the unification of all things—and all people—in Christ. Paul highlights that this truth, previously unknown to past generations, is now made clear: everyone, including Jews and Gentiles, can find unity in Christ and share in His grace and mercy. Remember Ephesians 1:9-10? “...he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.”

Paul’s reference to the “mystery” in Ephesians 3:1-13 often points to God’s plan of salvation being revealed to the Gentiles through Christ. This theme appears throughout the New Testament, especially in Paul’s letters. Here are some passages that expand on this “mystery”:

- In Colossians 1:26-27, Paul emphasizes that the mystery is now revealed to believers, including Gentiles, with the profound truth that Christ lives in them.
- In Romans 16:25-26, Paul describes the mystery as something hidden in the past but now revealed to bring all nations, or Gentiles, into obedience through faith.
- In 1 Corinthians 2:7-10, the mystery includes the wisdom of God’s redemptive plan, which is fully revealed to those who love Him.
- In 1 Timothy 3:16, Paul summarizes the mystery in terms of the incarnation and glorification of Jesus, which reveals God’s plan for the world.
- Romans 11:25-26 discusses the mystery as it relates to the salvation of both Jews and Gentiles and God’s timing in revealing it.
- In 1 Peter 1:10-12, Peter points out that the mystery of salvation, revealed in Christ, was something that even prophets and angels sought to understand fully.
- In Matthew 13:11, Jesus uses the word “secrets” (or “mysteries”) in relation to the kingdom of heaven, indicating that certain truths are revealed to those who follow Him.

These passages together highlight the depth of God’s mysterious plan—hidden for ages but revealed in Christ for both Jews and Gentiles. Each of these references helps provide a fuller understanding of the “mystery” Paul refers to in Ephesians.

- In what ways does Paul tell us that the Jews and Gentiles were unified by the revelation of this

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mystery? How do you think this unifies people today?

Leaders: *In verse 6, Paul explained the mystery in three different ways. First, “Gentiles are fellow heirs.” They are heirs of God’s kingdom with the Jews. Heirs of God’s riches and spiritual blessings discussed in chapter one. Second, they are “members of the same body.” Jew and Gentile believers are together in one body, the wall of hostility between them broken down, now both together in Jesus. Third, they are “partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus.” Paul referred to Savior God promised to the Israelites throughout the Old Testament. Now, the Gentiles were partakers in this promise as well. And all of this was possible because of the gospel of Jesus. This mystery was never a mystery to God, but one He chose to reveal, to unveil, at this point in history.*

This is an important reminder that, as we've discussed over the past few weeks, Christ should be first in our lives, including in our relationships with others. Sometimes, we might be tempted to look at people living lives very different from our own and think they could never come to know Christ. Whether they believe in a different god, don't believe in God at all, or live in a way contrary to Christ's teachings, we may think it's impossible for them to be reached. But when we do this, we're limiting what we believe God's grace can do—just as the Jews once did with the Gentiles. Through Christ, God's grace is available to anyone who commits their life to Him. Christ's grace has the power to transform even the hardest heart, as it did with Paul. Do we truly believe this? Because it is true.

Our Response: Read Ephesians 3:7-11.

- Paul uses the phrases, “administration of God’s grace” (v. 2) and “administration of this mystery” (v. 9). What does Paul mean by these two phrases?

Leaders: *The word "administration" can also be understood as management or stewardship, referring both to the role of a steward and the responsibilities it entails. Paul was explaining that he had been given the responsibility for stewarding, or managing, God’s grace to the Gentiles. Nelson’s Commentary explains stewardship as “the work of a person who took care of all the financial affairs of a large household or business” and states, “Paul was entrusted with the stewardship of God’s economy, to dispense the riches of Christ to God’s household and to preach the Good News...The stewardship that God gave Paul for the benefit of the Ephesians had previously been a mystery. Now God was revealing this mystery more fully in Paul’s ministry to the Gentiles. The mystery was that Jews and Gentiles were to have an equal status in the church, the body of Christ.”*

- In verse 10, Paul talks about the wisdom of God being made known through the church. Knowing that Paul takes seriously his calling to steward God’s grace well, what does this mean for us as a church and as individual members of the body of Christ?

Leaders: *Simply understanding God’s grace that comes in the gospel is simply not enough. Not only are we called to understand it, but we are also enlisted in the service of Christ. Paul was now a servant of Christ (v. 7) because of “the gift of God’s grace”. Pau was connected to God and Christ and*

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other believers by God's grace, but he was also enlisted and empowered to do its good work through Christ.

We, individually and as the Church, are enlisted and empowered by the same grace Paul is talking about here. Warren Wiersbe says in his commentary on this passage, "The reason some churches are weak and ineffective is because they do not understand what they have in Christ." He continues to comment that this happens when we are, "not good stewards of the mystery". When we really see the grace we have in Christ, our desire should be to steward that grace well. To help others to experience that same wonderful grace that God has for them.

Read Ephesians 3:12-13.

- In Ephesians 3:1, Paul describes himself as a "prisoner for Christ Jesus." In vs. 13 he encourages believers not to lose heart because of his sufferings. We know scripture tells us that following Christ in today's world will bring challenges and sacrifices. What areas in our lives do we shy away from being good "stewards of God's grace" because it is uncomfortable or challenging? Are there ways we can improve in this area this as a church?

Leaders: *This can be a great time for people in your group to be vulnerable about the things that make them feel uncomfortable, unqualified, unprepared, or, for some reason, unwilling to live out their faith the way Christ is calling us to. Be willing to listen and encourage your group when they share. While this is important for us to consider as a church body also, don't let the discussion just stay on how VRBC can improve. For us as a church to do this better together, it is also important for us to be challenged and really take an introspective look at this in our own lives.*

- Consider verse 11-13 again. Knowing that anyone can be a part of God's family, and the call to be good stewards of God's grace, how do we maintain perseverance and resilience in your faith journey, even in the face of challenges and opposition?

Leaders: *Paul recognized that he was highly unqualified to carry out God's mission given to him (v. 8). But he knew that he was a part of something so much bigger than himself. Ephesians 3:11 tells us that this bigger plan is in accordance "to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus". We are too. We are a part of God's great plan that he set in motion from the beginning. He uses us despite our inadequacies, imperfections, and limitations. We are called by him to walk in obedience and humility before him knowing that we can find great freedom and confidence in the one who brings all things together for his good (v. 12). As John said in his message today, we have complete and direct access to the creator...and he desires our presence close to him. What an amazing revelation. As one commentator put it, "The world is waiting for Christians to begin to model what we say". So, even in challenging and uncomfortable times, we can trust that God's plan is good and that he is where we find the confidence to shine his light in the darkness, to be good stewards of his grace.*

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PRAY

First, divide into small groups to share and pray for one another.

1. Reflect on the areas in your life where you find it uncomfortable or challenging to “shine the light” of God’s grace to those who don’t know him
2. Ask God to help you gain confidence and freedom to steward his grace well.

Then come back together with the whole group to pray for VRBC.

1. Pray that God would show us ways to be a light in our community.
2. Ask God to give us, as a church, confidence and boldness to do what he asks as he reveals ways for us to be stewards of his grace in our community.